

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6681

INFO AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 5217

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, SHUM, AR

SUBJECT: EX PRESIDENT LANUSSE ARRESTED

REF: BUENOS AIRES 5150

1. FORMER PRESIDENT ALEJANDRO LANUSSE WAS PUT UNDER ARREST FOR FIVE DAYS IN CAMPO DE MAYO MILITARY GARRISON AUG 6 FOR CRITICIZING ANOTHER GENERAL'S STATEMENTS ACCUSING A FORMER CABINET MINISTER OF COMPLICITY WITH MARXIST SYMPATHIZERS. THE ARREST, WHICH HAS AROUSED GREAT PUBLIC ATTENTION, WAS ORDERED TWO DAYS AFTER LANUSSE RELEASED AN OPEN LETTER TO GENERAL VILAS SHARPLY PROTESTING VILAS' CHARGES THAT FORMER EDUCATION MINISTER GUSTAVO MALEK (1970-71) WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR IDEOLOGICAL INFILTRATION IN THE BAHIA BLANCA UNIVERSITY (REFTEL). LANUSSE ALSO QUESTIONED THE HASTINESS AND MANNER IN WHICH MALEK, NOW A UNESCO OFFICIAL IN MONTEVIDEO, WAS ACCUSED WITHOUT HAVING AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEFEND HIMSELF. MALEK HAS DENIED THE CHARGES AND DECLARED HE WILL RETURN TO ARGENTINA TO TESTIFY.

2. IN A STRONG EDITORIAL, THE BA HERALD TODAY (AUG 9) PRAISED LANUSSE'S COURAGE IN DEFENDING HIS FORMER MINISTER AND SAID HIS STATEMENT WAS AN IMPLICIT WARNING AGAINST THE DANGER OF UNCHECKED MILITARY-INSPIRED COMMUNIST WITCHHUNTS. "GENERAL LANUSSE HAS RAISED THE ISSUE THAT  
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IS ON EVERYONE'S MINDS, IF NOT ON THEIR LIPS, THESE

DAYS--RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS," SAID THE HERALD. RE-CALLING HIS EARLIER WARNING BEFORE THE MARCH 24 COUP OF THE DANGER OF MEETING ONE FORM OF EXTREMISM ONLY TO FAIL INTO ANOTHER, THE HERALD SAID THAT LANUSSE'S ACTION WILL MAKE HIM "THE SPOKESMAN THAT THE HOUR DEMANDS."

3. OTHER PAPERS WERE MORE CAUTIOUS IN REPORTING THE LANUSSE ARREST, SAYING THAT MILITARY SOURCES ATTRIBUTED THE DISCIPLINARY ARREST NOT TO WHAT LANUSSE WROTE BUT THE WAY IN WHICH HE PRESENTED HIS STATEMENT. LA NUEVA PROVINCIA, OF

BAHIA BLANCA CRITICIZED LANUSSE FOR QUESTIONING THE VALIDITY OF VILAS' CHARGES AND REBUKED HIS INTERFERENCE IN THE DANGEROUS FIGHT AGAINST SUBVERSIVE PENETRATION.

4. IN A LONG EDITORIAL SUNDAY (AUG 8), LA OPINION SAID THAT BY CHOOSING TO PUBLICIZE HIS CONCERN THROUGH AN OPEN LETTER RATHER THAN THROUGH PRIVATE MILITARY CHANNELS, LANUSSE WAS TESTING THE OPENNESS OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. "IN DOING WHAT HE DID, LANUSSE WAS LOOKING MUCH FURTHER THAN THE MALEK INCIDENT," VENTURED LA OPINION OBLIQUELY. THE PAPER WENT ON TO SAY THAT TO HAVE LET THE LANUSSE STATEMENT GO UNANSWERED COULD HAVE LED TO A DANGEROUS BREAKDOWN IN MILITARY DISCIPLINE.

5. COMMENT. WHILE THERE WAS NO QUESTION BUT THAT LANUSSE'S DEFIANT PUBLIC STATEMENT WAS A VIOLATION OF REGULATIONS GOVERNING CONDUCT OF MILITARY OFFICERS AND THEREFORE WOULD HAVE TO BE ANSWERED WITH SOME FORM OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION, IT NEVERTHELESS PUT THE JUNTA IN A QUANDRY. FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN UPHOLDING GENERAL VILAS (WHOSE PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORTS MAY BE DEPLORED BUT WHICH NEVERTHELESS APPARENTLY HAD THE APPROVAL OF HIS MILITARY SUPERIORS) AGAINST LANUSSE'S OPEN CRITICISM, THE JUNTA OPTED FOR A STRONG SHOW OF MILITARY DISCIPLINE AND AUTHORITY. WITH LANUSSE'S ARREST, THE JUNTA DOUBTLESS INTENDED TO SIGNAL THAT IT WILL NOT TOLERATE PUBLIC CRITICISM OR WHAT IT CONSIDERS TO BE INSUBORDINATION EVEN ON THE PART OF EX-MILITARY PRESIDENTS. THE GENERAL IMPRESSION LEFT ON PUBLIC

OPINION, HOWEVER, IS THAT LANUSSE WAS RIGHT--THAT VILAS' CONFIDENTIAL

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CHARGES WERE ILL-FOUNDED AND IRRESPONSIBLE. THUS THE QUESTION OF MILITARY REGULATIONS ASIDE, BY DEFENDING VILAS AND ARRESTING LANUSSE, PRESIDENT VIDELA CAME OUT THE LOSER IN THIS ROUND. HE DOUBTLESS INTENDED TO SHOW THAT THE MILITARY WILL NOT LET THE QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS INTERFERE WITH ITS GREATER PERCEIVED TASK OF WIPING OUT LEFTIST SENTIMENT AND SUBVERSION. TO THE NON-MILITARY OBSERVER, HOWEVER, HE APPEARS TO HAVE SUPPORTED THE ABSURD AGAINST THE FORCE OF LOGIC.

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